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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of social style training on the workers of a state agency in the midwest. The Social Style Training Workshop was a half-day session designed to provide participants with an assessment of their social style as perceived by their coworkers. In addition, participants examined the meaning of various social styles, their interactions with other styles, and how knowledge of these styles can help improve communication and communication satisfaction within the organization. The Communication Audit was used for both pretesting and posttesting (four months later) of the participants. Based on the literature of social style training, six hypotheses were advanced to assess the impact of the social style training session (e. g., social style training will lead to higher levels of trust among coworkers). The results did indicate some movement in the hypothesized directions, but they were not statistically significant. The results suggest either that (1) the session was not long enough to have a significant impact, (2) a social style training session approach really does not provide the types of benefits attributed to it, or (3) the time between the training program and the administration of the posttest led to a reduction of the possible benefits. (HTH)

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Impact of Communication Training in a State Agency

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Impact of Communication Training in a State Agency

ABSTRACT

Social style training has been suggested as a means of improving communication within an organization. This paper reports on the effect of social style training on a state agency in Ohio. The ICA Communication Audit was used for both the pre and post tests of participants in the organization. Based upon the literature of social style training, six hypotheses are advanced with respect to the impact of social style training (e.g. social style training will lead to higher levels of trust among co-workers). The results do indicate some movement in the hypothesized directions, but they are not statistically significant. The authors conclude with suggestions on how the impact of social style training might be heightened.

1. Introduction[1]

During the past decade there has been a mushrooming of training programs designed to improve interpersonal skills in communication as a step towards improving organizational effectiveness. One important approach has been the use of social style assessment instruments (e.g. Wilson Learning Corporation's Social Style Profile, Personal Dynamics Institute's Personal Pattern Assessment, and Roger Birkman's Birkman Method).

Researchers in communication are well aware that the framework upon which communicative relationships are formed is created from the complex set of perceptions of the individual interactants: selective perception to messages, selective retention of perceived information, selective recall of the selectively retained information, etc. What is also very clear is the role played by first impressions in contributing to the framework of perception. If a person is perceived, on first meeting, as warm, friendly, interesting and interested in the other person, then the communication pattern that develops is likely to be one of openness and honesty. On the other hand, should those first impressions be neutral or negative then the resulting interaction patterns are only going to be accessed occasionally and with caution.

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[1] Partial support for the project described in this paper was provided by a grant from the Ohio University Research Committee.

The use of social style training programs to provide participants with information about their communicative style is based on the premise that such training enables the individual to understand better and adapt to the social style of others. Such adaptation in the interaction patterns contributes to the overall improvement of the communication environment in the work place and subsequent satisfaction with other workers. The assumption behind such training programs has been that improved social style awareness will lead to an improvement in organizational communication climate. This, in turn, will result in an improvement in organizational effectiveness and/or efficiency.

The importance of perceived communication patterns in the modern organization has become increasingly apparent during the past decade. Although it is almost 45 years since Chester Barnard noted that communication was the first task of the manager, systematic analysis of perceived communication patterns did not begin until the development of the Communications Audit (Odiorne, 1954) and more particularly, the International Communication Association (ICA) Communication Audit in the 1970s. Howard Greenbaum, writing in 1975, pointed out that it was unusual "to encounter an organization that performs periodic and formal appraisals of the general communication system for the purpose of maintaining and developing the effectiveness of this vital interaction-influence function." (1975, p.2)

It is the purpose of this paper to report on the evaluation of a social style management training program in a state agency. The first part will discuss, briefly, public sector training evaluation efforts in general and in Ohio in particular. The second part will focus on the evaluation of the specific program.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EVALUATION IN OHIO

The field of evaluation, and particularly evaluation research, has expanded almost geometrically during the past decade. It is becoming recognized, at least among scholars, that an evaluation component should be an integral part of any program. It is an element that should be planned for at the initial stages of program development, implemented as part of the program itself, and used to assess the impact of the program. Information on the effectiveness of the program is important in providing feedback to those in charge, both in a monitoring sense and in the sense of determining future developments.

Unfortunately, for many practioners in the public sector, program evaluation is still seen as an unneeded add-on, or something that Congress or the state legislature has required but which few, if any, government officials really know how to handle. This has been evident in the growing requirement found in many federal programs during the mid 1970s for an evaluation component. In many cases it was ap-

parent that what was included in grant applications was hastily written with little or no understanding of the requirements of evaluation.

This is particularly true in the area of training and development. Within this field the phase which we call "evaluation" has only recently been added to the training model. I.L. Goldstein (1975), in developing a systematic model of training, identified evaluation as the third major phase in the model (the other two being assessment and training development). McFillen (1982) has noted that the evaluation phase, as a component of training, would not have been included in a standard personnel administration textbook as late as the mid-1970s.

The importance of evaluation is now filtering down to the field. In the January, 1982, issue of Training and Development Journal, Zenger and Hargis suggest that it is time that organizations engaged in training take the "Evaluation Plunge."

If formal training and development programs in general, and their evaluation in particular, have been late in coming into the private sector, they are even later in the public sector.

In both public and private sectors the purpose of evaluation in training is to determine whether the training program has met its objectives. This requires that those training objectives be clearly spelled out, a requirement

that is not always met. Assuming that there are identifiable training objectives, however, there are four levels of evaluations possible: reactions, learning, behavior, and results (Wexley and Latham, 1981, p.78). These correspond to four common questions asked of training programs:

1. Are the trainees happy with the program (the so-called "happiness questionnaires")?
2. Do the materials teach the concepts?
3. Are the concepts or skills used on the job?
4. Does the application of the concepts or skills positively affect the organization?

It is obvious that the field of the evaluation of management training is one that, while recognized as important, is still "emergent".

This is particularly true at the state level. That "hard times" are with us is evident in virtually every state agency in the nation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mortality of training programs, especially management training programs, and the evaluation of them. Recently, for example, one administrative department in Ohio cancelled its entire training program for the Spring. Training and development personnel now look back nostalgically upon the early and mid-1970s when IPA programs permitted a number of states to expand management training programs and the evaluation of them. Under IPA Ohio formed a Training Council to coordinate the efforts and exchange information among the training

officers in many of the state departments and agencies. But, by 1978, many of these programs had gone the way of the funding that supported them.

Nonetheless, the news about evaluation efforts is not all bleak, for more and more administrators are becoming aware of the importance of training and of the evaluation of that training. While there are no central efforts at training or evaluation in the state of Ohio, most training officers have attempted to build into their programs at least some direct evaluation.

The Department of Administrative Services, for example, provides "cafeteria style" management training programs, ranging from time-management to assertiveness training, to improving organizational communication skills. Evaluation is primarily of the "reactive" type, with participants completing brief questionnaires immediately following the particular training session. The training officers would like to go beyond this, but a lack of staff (two individuals) precludes this.

Within the Department of Mental Health evaluation is also primarily reactive. There has been some movement towards the concept of action planning with follow-up on the plans. That is, each participant in a management training program is expected to develop a specific action plan. Several months following the program some of the the participants are contacted to determine the effectiveness of their plans.

However, this is not done as often as the training office would like.

The Department of Health has also attempted to move to the third level of evaluation. There has been some effort to use pre-post tests, although this has been focused on skills training programs. They have also examined personnel records to see if certain problems have improved (e.g., grievances). But, once again, the size of the training office (two trainers and an administrative assistant), limit what can be done.

One program in which evaluation has been built into the training effort is within the Rehabilitation Services Commisssion. The Training Office of the RSC considers themselves to be "tools" of their administration. They invite office directors to come to them whenever they see a problem or a need for improvement in their offices. At this point the Training Officer focuses on the question, what changes do the office directors wish to see in their staffs? From this behavioral training objectives are developed. After the training program the Training Office uses reactive evaluation sheets. But, beyond this, the Office attempts to document the long-term effectiveness of training by contacting from one-half to all of the participants in a specific program. Finally, supervisors are contacted to determine whether they have "noticed any difference" in the performance of those who report to them.

3. EVALUATING SOCIAL STYLES TRAINING IN A STATE DEPARTMENT

During 1982-1983 the Division of Administrative Services of a state of Ohio department worked with two members of the faculty of Ohio University in assessing overall organizational communication patterns and needs and in providing a social style management training program designed to improve the organizational communication climate in the division. The two activities (organizational communication assessment and social style training), while logically separate, were used together to provide an evaluation of the training program. By using the assessment instrument as the evaluation device, and by staggering the training program, a classic evaluation design using the "Nonequivalent Control Group" (Campbell and Stanley, 1963) was developed.

3.1 THE DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Division of Administrative Services (DAS) provides several administrative services within one of the departments of the State of Ohio. There are seven offices within the division such as communications, facilities development, human services, and information systems. The administrative head of the division is a "commissioner" who reports to the departmental director.

Most of the division is located in the new state office tower in Columbus. During the time that this program was undertaken there were 103 employees in the division. For

purposes of the training program the largest office (fiscal services) was divided into four parts, one of which was physically separate from the other.

3.2 THE SOCIAL STYLES TRAINING PROGRAM

The research that led to the development of social style training comes from a large body of literature in the social sciences. Underpinning this development were four assumptions noted by Lashbrook (1980):

1. Humans develop relatively stable behavior patterns.
2. Humans form immediate impressions about others based on their verbal and nonverbal behavior.
3. The way individuals behave toward one another is largely determined by their perceptions of each other.
4. The most prevalent and, probably, most important perceptual dimensions are assertiveness and responsiveness (p.1).

Social style training itself is based on several premises.[2] The first is that the behavior of individuals can be categorized into various "social styles". Second, knowledge of the nature of social style categories and an awareness of how one is perceived by others are important foundations for social style awareness training. Third, that awareness of the effects of social style differences on organizational

[2] An excellent discussion of social styles is found in Merrill and Reid (1981).

communication can lead to improved understanding and to improved organizational communication climate.

One of the leaders in the field of Social Styles Training is the Wilson Learning Corporation. WLC has develcped a 32 item instrument designed to assess two major dimensions in social style: assertiveness and responsiveness. Using these two dimensions individuals are placed into one of four major social styles (see Figure 1): driver (high assertiveness and low responsiveness), analytical (low assertiveness and low responsiveness), amiable (low assertiveness and high responsiveness), and expressive (high assertiveness and high responsiveness).

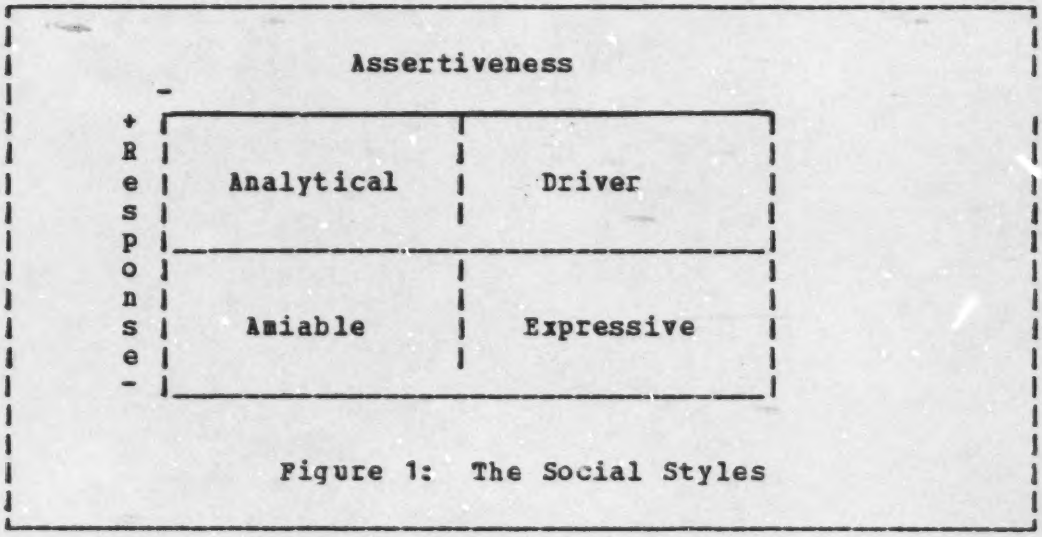

Figure 1: The Social Styles

A third dimension, versatility, is also measured but does not affect placement in one of the four major social styles.

The social style instrument, with 32 low-high continuous scales, has been extensively tested for both reliability and validity. According to the Wilson Learning Corporation (WLC), the sample base is adequate, the factor structure remains relatively stable, and there is good construct and predictive validity. Reliability scores meet or exceed .80 for each of the dimensions.

Each participant in a social style program has at least four of his/her co-workers complete the instrument. These completed instruments are in turn analyzed with a program developed by WLC and used with their permission. The resulting computerized Social Style Profile is individualized according to which of the four primary quadrants an individual fits into. The four styles are characterized by behavioral assusmptions; however, the most important assumptions rest not with the individual social styles but with the two major dimensions structing the four styles.

The responsiveness dimension is thought to describe individuals who are likely to excell in social encounters -- those situations where their people skills and relationship orientation will find its outlet. The assertiveness dimension seems to characterize individuals who are taks-oriented and tend to be more effective communicators (Lashbrook, 1980).

The Social Style TRaining Workshop lasts half a day and is designed to provide each participant with an assessment

of her/his social style as perceived by his/her co-workers. In addition, an examination of the meaning of the various social styles, their interactions with other styles, and how knowledge of their own styles and the styles of others can help to improve communication and communication satisfaction within the organization.

In discussing the inclusion of social style training into a participative management program at Motorola, Sullivan (1980) summarized the reasons for using such an approach to interpersonal relationships at the managerial level as follows:

> An understanding of these four social styles ostensibly provides a frame of reference [for] describing or managing interpersonal behavior/communication. If a person can learn to accurately identify different social styles, he/she also will understand the direction his/her communication should take. The ability to recognize characteristic behavior patterns in people presumably depends to a large extent on the development of an effective frame of reference. The intent of the social style system is to provide such a reference for persons attempting to maximize their interpersonal skills. (p.9)

Thus, the Social Styles Training Program is designed primarily to identify the individual's own "profile" and to help him/her understand how that style relates to others. It is this "differences awareness" enhancement that is a key to social style training.

3.3 EVALUATION HYPOTHESES

In order to assess the effects of the social style training program several hypotheses were developed for testing. These were derived from the reported effects of social style training and were as follows:

1. Social style training will lead to higher levels of trust among co-workers.
2. Social style training will lead to improved relations between managers and their subordinates.
3. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information desired.
4. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information desired among co-workers.
5. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information between managers and subordinates.
6. Social style training will lead to an improvement in organizational satisfaction.

3.4 EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

The evaluation instrument used was derived from sections of the Communication Audit developed by the International Communication Association (ICA).[3] Three parts of the audit

[3] The ICA Communication Audit and its uses is described in Goldhaber and Rogers (1979).

were being used to identify the patterns of organizational communication within the division. The first part consists of in-depth interviews with ten percent of the division members who were randomly selected. The second was a questionnaire survey of 138 items divided into eight parts: information received, information sent, sources of information, relationships, organizational outcomes, channels of communication, and a set of demographic data. The non-demographic items are measured by a five-part Likert scale. The third is a critical incident survey related to communication experiences. The portions of the audit relevant for this evaluation are found in the questionnaire, particularly the sections on communication relationships, (e.g. "My immediate supervisor listens to me.") and organizational outcomes (e.g. "How satisfied are you with your job?").

3.5 PROCEDURES

Members of the division were introduced to the entire project in a general meeting in late May, 1982. They were assured that their participation in the project was voluntary, that their individual identities would be known only to the two Ohio University researchers, and that by the end of the project all who wished to participate in the social style training program would be included.

In June, interviews were conducted and the audit questionnaire was distributed to all members of the division. Seventy-two were completed and returned.

Each major work group (office) in the division was randomly assigned to either the control or experimental groups. Participants in the experimental groups then distributed social style questionnaires to their co-workers who returned them directly to the researchers.

The training program was conducted for members of the experimental group in July. Unfortunately, not all members of the experimental group participated in the training program at this time. However, the researchers felt that the twenty-four who did constituted a sufficiently large group to permit an evaluation of the program because it included two complete work groups.

In November, the audit questionnaire was again distributed to all persons in the division. Sixty-one were completed. Table 1 summarizes participation and participation rates within the program.

Comparisons were then made in the differentials in the changes noted in the various variables related to the suggested hypotheses using standard statistical programs.*

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* It should be noted that the Likert scales and resulting indices were analyzed using the "analysis of variance" procedures in the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). This procedure has wide acceptance in the field of organizational communication. In addition the Kruskal-Wallis statistics are reported.

TABLE 1

Participation in the Project

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Number	54	48
First Quest Returned	38	34
Second Quest Returned	32	29
Participated In First Sem.	0	24

3.6 RESULTS

The statistical analysis leads one to the typical "good new - bad news" type of statement. The good news is that a comparison of the changes between the experimental and control groups generally supports the proposed hypotheses. The bad news is that the differences are not statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level.

Let us look specifically at each hypothesis and the results for that hypothesis.[5]

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[5] In reporting the results that follow, the numbers given for the experimental and control groups represent the amount of change in the variable being measured between the time of the first audit questionnaire in June and the second audit questionnaire in November.

1. Social style training will lead to higher levels of trust among co-workers. (See Table 2)

TABLE 2

Change in Index of Trust of Co-Workers

Exp. Gp. .36 F=1.79 P>.186
Cont.Gp. .06

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=1.43, df=1, p>chisq=.232)

Of the results noted in this paper the change in trust levels most closely approaches the required levels of statistical significance. In terms of mean scores there is a third of a "level" shift greater in the experimental group than in the control group. If nothing else, it would appear that there is a greater awareness of social style differences which may lead to increased trust.

2. Social style training will lead to improved relations between workers and their supervisors. (See Table 3)

In both groups there was a miniscule decline in relations between workers and their supervisors, although it was ever-so-slightly more in the control group. Part of this may be due to increased uncertainty due to a declining economic situation and an election in the state which would lead, in two months time from the date of the second survey, to a change in state administration.

TABLE 3

Change in Index of Relations with Supervisors

Exp. Gp.	-.12	F=.07	P>.788
Cont.Gp.	-.19		

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.42, df=1, P>Chisq=.518)

3. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information received. (See Table 4)

TABLE 4

Reduction in Divergence Between Actual and Needed Levels of Information Received

Exp. Gp.	.28	F=1.20	P>.277
Cont.Gp.	.11		

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.05, df=1, P>Chisq=.816)

It is usual in surveys using the ICA audit questionnaire (and most other audit questionnaires) for respondents to desire more information than they actually receive. This "gap" between actual and need leads to communication frustration and dissatisfaction. Thus, a reduction in the divergence level is important in improving organizational communication climate.

For this reason it is to be noted that the reduction in this divergence is greater in the experimental group than in the control group, although, once again, not significantly so.

4. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information received from co-workers. (See Table 5)

TABLE 5

Reduction in Divergence Between Actual and Needed Levels of Information from Co-Workers

Exp. Gp.	.48	F=.08	P>.783
Cont. Gp.	.40		

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.13, df=1, P>Chisq=.716)

Once again, a slight improvement in the experimental group, but not significantly so.

5. Social style training will lead to a reduction in the divergence between actual and needed levels of information between managers and subordinates. (See Tables 6 and 7).

This hypothesis was measured from two directions: from the point of view of managers towards their subordinates, and from the point of view of the workers towards their supervisors. While every worker has a supervisor, not all

TABLE 6

Reduction in Divergence Between Actual and Needed Levels of Information from Subordinates

Exp. Gp.	.33	F=.16	P>.694
Cntl.Gp.	.19		

(n=9 Exp. Gp., n=26 Cont. Gp.)

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.13, df=1, P>Chisq=.720)

TABLE 7

Reduction in Divergence Between Actual and Needed Levels of Information Received from Managers-Supervisors

Exp. Gp.	.05	F=.00	P>.998
Cntl.Gp.	.05		

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.04, df=1, P>Chisq=.846)

workers are supervisors, hence the reduction in the numbers of the experimental and control groups.

From the point of view of managers and their subordinates, there does appear to be a slight improvement. But, from the point of view of workers and their supervisors, there appears to be no change.

6. Social style training will lead to an improvement in organizational satisfaction. (See Table 8)

TABLE 8

Change in Satisfaction in Working in the Division

Exp. Gp.	.09	F=.24	P>.628
Cntl.Gp.	-.03		

(Kruskal-Wallis: Chisq=.03, df=1, P>Chisq=.860)

The numbers indicate a slight improvement in the satisfaction level in the experimental group as compared with the control group.

3.7 DISCUSSION

As is noted above, the social style training program may be considered a qualified success...success in that there seems to have been an improvement in most of the suggested benefits of the program. However, in no case was the improvement statistically significant.

There are several reasons one could advance for this lack of statistical significance. The most obvious is that a single half-day training program, given the totality of the environment of the division, cannot really be expected

to make a large impact on workers and managers attitudes. "Trust" and "satisfaction" are the products of a number of important elements. Social style training would appear to have an impact, but it is only the beginning of the effort to create change

A second possibility, of course, is that a social style training approach really does not have the types of benefits claimed for it. Given the improvements noted, however, (even as small as they are), there does appear to be some impact.

Research efforts coordinated by Wilson Learning Corporation point to a variety of benefits from the social style system. Lashbrook (1980) notes relationships with tension management, identification of communication apprehension, conflict management, decision making, nonverbal behavioral indices, and interpersonal relationships management. While the results of this research program did not provide the desired level of change in the participants, there is a sufficient indication that, with modification in the design of the training program, such results may be forthcoming.

And, a third possibility is that the time between the training program and the administration of the second survey (over four months) led to a reduction in the possible benefits. It may be that a "refresher" is needed at some point after the initial training program.

One of the difficult tasks facing any researcher in the behavioral sciences is the dilemma of measuring the purported changes. Because interpersonal communicative relationships are so complex, the id identification of a single variable as the causal link between sensitization and resulting change is virtually impossible. The fact that participants perceived some change was made is a positive sign, but it may never be possible to draw the concluding link with clarity.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

At the beginning of this project we were interested primarily in determining whether a social style management training program would lead to an improvement in organizational climate, particularly within the work group. As the project progressed, we also became interested in the problems of evaluation at the state level. Thus, this paper addresses both questions.

With respect to the first question, that of evaluating the social style training program as a method of improving organizational communication, it would appear that this program can lead to improvement. It is apparent that the degree of improvement noted is minimal, but two specific suggestions might strengthen the impact of social style training. First, expand the training session to a full day. Second, provide a refresher seminar two to three months af-

ter the initial workshop. Additional testing of the training program, through such instruments as the ICA Audit, will undoubtedly lead to additional improvements.

With respect to evaluation efforts at the state level, we have become even more aware of the lack of them, on the one hand, and of the difficulties in conducting them, on the other. One problem in this project was that it was based on "voluntary participation". The existing multitude of demands on employees of state agencies for their time can lead to a high drop out (mortality) rate. For example, one of the reasons for the relatively small participation in the first training session was that three of the members of the experimental group were involved in preparing a grant application that had to be completed within the week...thus preventing them from going to the training session for one afternoon.

And, of course, a major obstacle to evaluation in the public sector lies in the reality that evaluation is still not a high priority item when budgets become tighter. The efforts of training and development officers are directed toward the training programs themselves, with hopes that the purported benefits from them are as claimed.

There is one possible source of help, however, and this is possible collaboration between public agencies and colleges and universities. In many cases faculty seek the opportunity to undertake research involving evaluation ef-

forts, or teach classes in evaluation which would benefit from using actual governmental agencies. Such collaboration does require a certain amount of flexibility on the part of both academics and practioners, but the evaluation reported in this paper is an example of what can be done.

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